

quoted Dale Bosworth, head the U.S. Forest Service, who said, "We have so many more trees out there than under natural conditions. There might have been 40 or 50 Ponderosa pine per acre at one time. Now you have several hundred per acre."

The June 27 Washington Post had a headline reading, "Did politics put a match to West wild lands?"

As I said, we were warned in the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health that these fires would occur, also in early 1998 that we had some 40 million acres in imminent and immediate danger of catastrophic fires. Yet the political strengths of environmental groups were too strong to do anything about it.

Jay Ambrose, director of editorial policy for the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain, wrote that the most flammable and dead trees and underbrush should have been removed, but "the extreme environmentalists hate the prospect. It is unconscionable to them that anyone might make money off the forests. Never mind that a multi-use, private-public plan would help save the national forests from high-heat scorching fires that will slow renewed growth, and never mind that mechanical thinning would give firefighters a chance of controlling fires and protecting homes without risking their own lives."

□ 1145

Mr. Ambrose ended by saying, "The extremist ideology spits on private enterprise."

Mr. Speaker, these fires are continuing. We have been holding a hearing today in the Committee on Resources about this important issue with the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture. The Congress passed a law in the mid-1980s that the environmentalists wanted saying that we would not cut more than 80 percent of the new growth in the national forests. Now we have approximately 23 billion board feet of new growth each year, but we are only allowing less than 3 billion board feet, less than one-seventh of the new growth to be cut. This is less than half of the dead and dying trees. This has led to a tremendous fuel buildup on the floor of the forests and is the main reason for these fires that we have been having out West.

Robert Nelson, a professor at the University of Maryland, wrote a column and said, "In fact, over the last decade, it was more important to the Clinton administration to promote wilderness values by creating roadless areas and taking other actions to exclude a human presence. This aggravated last summer's tinderbox forest conditions and continues to threaten public land." He said Federal policies have "produced an enormous buildup of small trees, underbrush and deadwood that provide excess fuels to feed flames."

Mr. Speaker, you have to cut some trees to have a healthy forest and pre-

vent forest fires, yet, amazingly, there are extremists that oppose even the removal of dead and dying trees.

Professor Nelson said in many Federal forests, tree density has increased since the 1940s from 50 per acre to 300 to 500 per acre and that these forests are "filled with dense strands of small, stressed trees and plants that combine with any deadwood to provide virtual kindling wood for forest fires."

I recently read Bill Bryson's book about hiking the Appalachian Trail. He noted that New England was only 30 percent in forest land in 1850, but is 70 percent in forest land today. The Knoxville News-Sentinel reported a couple of years ago that Tennessee was 36 percent in forest land in 1950, while today it is almost half in forest land. Yet, if I went in any school in my district in Tennessee and asked the students there if there are more trees today than 50 or 150 years ago, they would probably all say there are many, many fewer trees today.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a tremendous amount of brainwashing going on about this type of issue, but we need to cut some trees so we can stop these horrendous forest fires out West.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. JEFF MILLER of Florida). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. FILNER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AT PLUM ISLAND RESEARCH CENTER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SIMMONS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, I am joined here today by my colleague, the gentleman from New York (Mr. GRUCCI), of the Second Congressional District of New York. I, of course, represent the Second Congressional District in Connecticut. We share a common border that runs right down the center of Long Island Sound. Located in the center of Long Island Sound is the Plum Island Research Center, an activity of the U.S. Department of Agriculture which, for 50 years, has been engaged in very sensitive scientific research into animal diseases. This is a very sensitive and very important activity, especially now, especially now when issues of bioterrorism raise the question as to whether America's food supply is safe.

It is against this backdrop of national security and against this backdrop of Long Island Sound, a very precious and important environmental asset, that I rise today to make my remarks in support of the Operating Engineers Local 30 of the AFL-CIO which, for the first time in 50 years, the first

time in 50 years, has gone out on strike against the Plum Island facility.

These workers have been without a contract for 11 months. The last offer that they got from the civilian contractor degraded their pay and their benefits dramatically for the third time in the last 10 years. Finally, in desperation, with no other alternative available to them, they have gone out on strike. All they are asking for, all they are asking for at this point to go back to work is binding arbitration; binding arbitration. How difficult is that? How serious a request is that? Binding arbitration.

Mr. GRUCCI. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. SIMMONS. I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. GRUCCI. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for sharing this time with me, and we will continue this dialogue in the next 5 minutes as well, but I do want to join in with my colleague, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SIMMONS). I represent the First Congressional District of New York where Plum Island is indeed housed. I share with him his passion for our workers, the men and the women who make up Local 30 of the Operating Engineers. Indeed, they do have a legitimate gripe against LL&B, the managing entity for Plum Island. We are talking about being 50 cents apart that would bring conclusion to this strike, that would bring conclusion to them being without a contract for 11 months.

As I said to those in the Department of Agriculture and as I said to those in the White House, and as I said to those who manage LL&B, we have a much bigger picture here than just the 75 employees that are at Plum Island who I care for very deeply; we also have the whole issue of our homeland defense. As Plum Island moves out from under the umbrella of the Department of Agriculture and is hoped to be a part of homeland defense, we must make sure that the employees are treated fairly and are treated equally as they were before the switch into homeland defense. I said to those folks, make sure that you do not jeopardize the intent of the President to have a homeland defense that has indeed incorporated Plum Island into it, because if you do not treat our employees properly, if you do not treat them with the respect that they deserve, if you do not treat them fairly, I cannot support it, and you will be held responsible, LL&B, for the actions taken by you against a number of people who are only asking for an increase of 50 cents towards their medical portion of their health care costs.

I know that the gentleman from Connecticut shares with me not only the concerns for the employees and the scientists, but that very precious body of water that lies between Connecticut and Long Island, which is the Long Island Sound, and we have been working together on a number of those issues like bringing \$11 million back to help

purify and clean that pristine body of water. But today we are here to talk about the employees of Plum Island.

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his comments. It is always a pleasure to work with him across district lines, across State lines, but for the common good and for a common purpose.

The interesting thing about Plum Island is that over the 50 years of its sensitive and secure research, there have not been any significant accidents or issues that might concern us, but the question has to be raised: If all of the operating engineers, the people that operate the boats, the people that operate the water systems, the people that operate the incinerators and the air-conditioning systems of this sensitive biological research facility are taken off the island and are not there because of this strike, the people who are licensed to operate all of these facilities are not there and we bring in outside workers from other facilities around the country, which bear no relationship to this kind of research, what risks exist? I realize that the managers say everything is great, everything is fine. I do not believe it. I think that there is a security issue that we have to be concerned about. I think that the sensitive mission that takes place out there is being disrupted because of the strike, and it is over a few nickels and dimes of health benefits and health care.

Mr. Speaker, this is a ridiculous situation for us to be in, when this body has authorized and appropriated literally billions of dollars in the fight against international terrorism and yet we are shortchanging reliable, honest, decent workers right here at home, right out there on Plum Island.

Mr. GRUCCI. Mr. Speaker, I agree wholeheartedly with all of the comments and associate myself to them of the gentleman from Connecticut. One of the things that is hard for other people to understand is that when you look at the cost of living on Long Island and certainly out in that region, it is very costly, and to bring this to conclusion would be the right thing.

CONTINUED DISCUSSION OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION AT PLUM ISLAND RESEARCH CENTER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. GRUCCI) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GRUCCI. Mr. Speaker, I rise to address the House today and to share in a colloquy with the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SIMMONS), and to continue this discussion that we have been having on Plum Island and Plum Island issues.

We have been talking about the need for this debate that is taking place about 50 cents for health care benefits to come to conclusion. One of the things that I have offered up, as I have been in constant communication with

the members and the leadership of Local 30, and I have been in constant communication with the White House on this issue, and I have spoken to the Under Secretary and to the Secretary of Agriculture on this issue; I have spoken to a number of people at LL&B on this issue to bring this thing to conclusion, and we have offered a mediator to come in to mediate these problems.

The gentleman whose name was put into consideration, and, I may add, has been accepted by the union as a viable alternative to the strike that we have going on out there, is the Commissioner of Labor for Suffolk County, Jack O'Donnell. Jack has a long and rich history in negotiating labor disputes between government and between labor and guiding them to a successful and complete resolution in the best interest of all parties concerned. We have not heard back from LL&B as to whether or not they would accept Mr. O'Donnell as the mediator, but we would encourage them to please consider this. It is very, very important that we bring this to conclusion.

There is an issue about safety on the island. We care very deeply about that. Plum Island's animal disease research work is being done at bio-safety level 3. We are concerned that any change in that would have a Draconian effect on the safety of the community and the people who live in that area, as it would now be able to do diseases and work on diseases that have no known cures. So one of the things that I worked on on the Committee on Science, as Plum Island was moving to homeland defense, was that an amendment be added that for any change in operation, the Department of Agriculture or the new Homeland Defense Department, must notify Congress so that we can have our voices heard on this decision, so that those who work on the island, those who live in that community, and those who share a common boundary with Plum Island can make sure that their quality of life is safe.

I yield now to my colleague, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SIMMONS), representing the Second Congressional District, as we share common ground, not only with the Long Island Sound, but with workers on Plum Island.

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New York. I have had the opportunity to go to the picket line in my district in Connecticut and meet and talk with all of the workers there. They want to get back to work. One of them said his wife is 7 months pregnant. He is concerned about the future of his job. She is concerned about whether he will have enough money over the next couple of months so that they can deal with the arrival of a firstborn.

Many of these workers have been out there for many years. They enjoy their work and they are good at it. But this contracting and recontracting and recontracting has degraded the numbers

of the workforce and has put tremendous burdens and pressures on them. To take away pay and benefits at the same time and to ignore binding arbitration requests and, in fact, it appears to ignore a request for mediation that was supposed to have taken place on September 4, is ridiculous under the circumstances.

Let me just share with the Chamber one situation we had a few years ago with the Naval Underwater Warfare Center in New London and in Newport, Rhode Island. When that facility was consolidated in Newport, all of the scientists who lived west of New London were now going to have to commute for an hour and a half to work. Many of the senior scientists retired or resigned because they did not want to do the commute. If Plum Island happens to be shut down because management cannot accommodate the marginal requests of the workers, where is this research going to be moved to? Ames, Iowa. And all of the dozens and dozens of skilled scientists and workers out there are going to have to make this critical choice: Do I move to Iowa, or do I find another job?

Mr. Speaker, we have a situation here which is ridiculous, because the capabilities of this facility that has been operated smoothly for 50 years is now at risk, and at a time when bioterrorism and threats to the food supply are so critical, it is absurd, it is absurd that the debate over these nickels and dimes for health care should be allowed to be sustained.

□ 1200

Mr. GRUCCI. As my colleague will attest to, the work done at Plum Island has been exemplary. Those in the scientific community, those in the maintenance field, those who work on Plum Island have done an outstanding job, and it has just come to my attention that the teams did meet yesterday. We are hoping to bring them to conclusion.

I see that my time has expired, but let me close by saying I am squarely in support of the union and the labor movement on this. I think they are right. This is an issue of 50 cents, and for LL&B to close out any opportunity for them to come to conclusion is wrong. We need to bring this to a successful end.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. JEFF MILLER of Florida). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mrs. DAVIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. DAVIS of California, addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.